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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

8 August 1986

India: Slim Chance for US Involvement in
Advanced Light Helicopter Program [REDACTED]

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Summary

The opportunity for major US involvement in India's Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) program has passed. The Indians have completed the preliminary design work with the help of a West German firm, and so far have chosen only West European components for the helicopter. New Delhi gives US technology high marks, but has been reluctant to buy US military hardware because it considers Washington to be an unreliable supplier. Good opportunities remain, however, for the US to help the Indians develop tactical doctrine for their helicopter forces. [REDACTED]

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India is well along in its program to design and produce its own Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH). US defense attache and press sources report the program calls for an approximately 10,000 lb., twin-engine, all weather helicopter capable of carrying a 4,500 lb. payload as high as 20,000 ft. The Indians plan to use the ALH primarily as an attack and troop transport helicopter for the Army, an anti-submarine warfare platform for the Navy, and a general utility craft for the Air Force. Current plans call for four ALH prototypes to be built between November 1988 and July 1990 with production of as many as 300 helicopters to begin soon after. [REDACTED]

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This memorandum was prepared by [REDACTED] the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, at the request of Major W. Andrew Ritezel, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army. Information as of 8 August 1986 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, South Asia Division, NESA [REDACTED]

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[redacted] the ALH will be a patchwork of mainly Western components in an Indian-produced airframe. The Indians are developing the ALH in cooperation with the West German firm Messerschmitt-Boelkow-Blohm, which is heavily involved in India's light combat aircraft program. [redacted]

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[redacted] rotor blades probably have been chosen for the ALH. We believe that the Indians' proclivity for European components for the ALH and the fast approaching deadline for completion of the first prototype, which will test basic flight systems, means that most of the remaining major components likely also will be European. The follow-on ALH prototypes, which will test mission-specific systems, are scheduled far enough in the future that the Indians could still choose some US systems. [redacted]

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Perceived US Unreliability

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Although the Indians are actively seeking Western technology in general, they are reluctant to draw heavily on the US for defense related equipment. [redacted] most Indian Air Force officers consider US military equipment the best in the world, but the Indians are wary that Washington will embargo important defense related items to India in the event of a conflict with Pakistan. [redacted]

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Potential for US Participation

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In our judgment, the greatest potential for US involvement with the Indian helicopter program lies in helping develop doctrine for helicopter use. India has just begun organizing its helicopters for combat missions distinct from the ad hoc, largely logistics role helicopters have played to date in the Indian military. The Indian Army recently won control of the Air Forces' attack and troop transport helicopters after a long bureaucratic struggle and plans to begin forming them into a helicopter division this year, [redacted]

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The Army soon will begin developing doctrine for this division, and [redacted] Indian defense officials consider the US, largely because of its Vietnam experience, preeminent in helicopter tactics. The Indian military often borrows doctrine from other countries, frequently through participation in foreign military training courses, for its own expanding and modernizing force structure. Chief of Army Staff Gen. Sundarji, a graduate of the US Army Command and General Staff College and considered by many to be an innovative military thinker, would likely respond positively to a high level invitation for him or some of his officers to attend a presentation on helicopter tactics or perhaps witness an air assault

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exercise. If the climate in Indo-US military cooperation continues to improve, we believe the Indians may want to send a small number of student officers to Ft. Rucker and Ft. Campbell for instruction in helicopter operations.

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External Distribution:

Ms. Sandra Charles

Director, Near East South Asia Region, International Security Affairs
Department of Defense, Room 4D765, Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301

Captain Edward Louis Christiansen, USN

Chief, South Asian Regional Plans and Policy Branch
Department of Defense, Room 2B973, Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301

Dr. Stephen Cohen

Policy Planning Staff

Department of State, Room 7311, Washington, DC 20520

Mr. James P. Covey

Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director,
Near East and South Asia Affairs, National Security Council
Old Executive Office Building, Room 351, Washington, DC 20500

Mr. H. Allen Holmes

Director, Bureau of Political Military Affairs
Department of State, Room 7327, Washington, DC 20520

Mr. Ron Lorton

Bureau of Intelligence and Research, South Asia Division
Department of State, Room 4636A, Washington, DC 20520

Mr. Michael MacMurray

Special Assistant for South Asia, International Security Affairs
Department of Defense, Room 4D765, Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301

Mr. Marc Palevitz

Special Assistant for South Asia, International Security Affairs,
Near Eastern-South Asian Region
Department of Defense, Room 4D765, Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301

LTC James Reese

Department of Defense, Room 4D1041, Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301

MAJ W. Andrew Pitezel

Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence
Department of the Army, Room 2A474, Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301

Mr. Christopher Ross

Director, Regional Affairs, Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs
Department of State, Room 5254A, Washington, DC 20520

Mr. Darnell Whitt

Intelligence Adviser to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
Department of Defense, Room 4D840, Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301

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